News release

Sights on summer

4 April 2005

Lack of winter rains has raised fears of water shortages over the coming months. The winter season is relied upon to replenish reservoir stocks, but this year has been particularly dry across the south of the country.

The period from November 2004 to March 2005 has been the driest in England and Wales since the same period in 1975/76. With a provisional rainfall total of 287.6 mm of rain in the period, it is placed 4th driest in the England and Wales Rainfall series maintained by the Met Office. The driest corresponding spell in the series is 1933/34. The series began in 1914 and uses all available data.

Comparison with 1976 will bring to mind the long hot summer of that year, but before we look at the prospects for this summer, the weather this week will remind us that it's still early spring. A brief cold snap with northerly winds on Friday is likely to bring wintry showers and a distinctly chilly feel to much of the country, followed by the risk of overnight frosts through the weekend.

Back to the long term forecast and latest predictions for the coming summer do favour warmer-than-average temperatures for much of northern Europe, from Britain to north-west Russia, but this in itself does not mean we can look forward to a host of warm, sunny days. Summer 2004 was actually a full degree warmer than average, but most people will recall it as being very wet, especially in August.

Met Office seasonal forecasts are routinely made as far as six months ahead and, whilst long-range predictions typically focus on general weather patterns rather than specific detail, these forecasts can give good, early advice. The forecast issued in November 2004 accurately predicted a colder winter for the Iberian Peninsula and a milder one for Scotland where the mean temperature was 1.6 C above normal.

Latest forecast for the UK

More about seasonal forecasts for the globe and how they are derived

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